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SUBJECT: SEAS-2007 BULLETIN NO. 2 - NOMINATIONS DUE 20 FEB 07

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¶1. (U) Embassy Vientiane is pleased to nominate Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Europe and Americas Department Director General (DG) Southam Sakonhninhom to attend this course. Our alternate candidate is Mr. Khamvone Phanouvong, MFA Asia-Pacific and Africa Department Deputy DG. Their personal information and Embassy justifications are below.

¶2. (U) Our nominee (following reftel information format):

Full name: Southam SAKONHNINHOM

Position Title: Director General, Europe and Americas
- Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (since 2003)

Responsibilities: DG Southam oversees relations between the
- Government of Laos (GOL) and all countries in Europe and the
- Americas -- including the United States.

Previous Positions: 1997-2003 Deputy DG, International
- Organizations Department. MFA
- 1993-1997 First Secretary, Lao Permanent
- Mission to the UN
- 1984-1991 Second Secretary, Lao Embassy, Paris

Education: MA in International Relations and Law,
- University of Kiev, former USSR

Publications: 2007: The Powerlessness of International Law;
- co-authored with Malayvieng Sakonhninhom;
- 2003: Non-Governmental Organizations in the
- Process of Globalization
- 1997: The Lao PDR in the United Nations
- 1977: United Nations Protocol

Memberships: 1975: Lao Youth Organization
- 1982: Lao Syndicate and Trade Union

Previous U.S. trips: September 2005: Head of delegation for the
- Lao-U.S. Consultative Talks on POW/MIA Accounting
- Cooperation in Honolulu, Hawaii;
August 2004: Head of delegation to meeting on
- "U.S. Worldwide POW/MIA Accounting Efforts: Process and
- Operation" in Honolulu, Hawaii;
August 2003: Head of delegation for the Lao-
- U.S. Consultative Talks on POW/MIA Accounting Cooperation in
- Honolulu, Hawaii; subsequently joined the Vice Minister of
- Foreign Affairs for a bilateral visit to Washington, D.C.

Languages/English: Lao, French, English, Russian; English is very
- good

Post Objectives: Director General Southam is especially important
to U.S. policy objectives since he is the senior Lao Government

official in the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue process which brings a team of USG officials to Vientiane for bilateral talks on the broad range of bilateral issues including POW/MIA accounting, unexploded ordnance (UXO), Avian Influenza preparations, counter-narcotics cooperation, human rights, and bilateral trade.

- In a broader sense, within the relatively closed working environment of Laos, all Embassy contacts have to go through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Contacting Ministries such as Public Security as well as the courts, the procuratorate, and the police is especially difficult. DG Southam for the past several years has been more than a gate-keeper for our contacts with the Lao Government; he has been the Embassy's highest-level regular interlocutor. In many cases he personally stepped up to push the bureaucracy to resolve critical problems. When a lack of official information on the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issue led the State Department to classify Laos as "Tier 3" -- non-cooperating, DG Southam got Lao prosecutors, court officials, and other government agencies to cooperate with the Embassy and provide closely-held information on the TIP issue and prosecutions that had underway without publicity. With the new information, Washington reclassified Laos as "Tier 2 Watch List" -- a much fairer assessment. In another area, DG Southam has been strongly supportive of the careful moves underway to improve our bilateral military-to-military relationship.

- Overall, DG Southam has been willing to take supportive action of this kind because he understands -- almost uniquely among senior Lao officials of his rank -- that our two countries have common interests. He also follows world events -- again very unusual here -- so that he is both willing to receive Department demarches on Iraq, North Korea, or Afghanistan and discuss them knowledgeably. DG Southam also is one of the very few senior Lao officials we know who reads serious English books (including the three Woodward works on President Bush), enjoys intellectual debate, and has an inquiring mind. Obviously his thirteen years in Paris and New York have paid some unique dividends. DG Southam's wife, Mrs. Malayvieng Sakonnhinhom, is also important to the Embassy as the Director General of the Foreign Affairs Institute -- a site where we have been able to bring senior American visitors -- including Congresswoman Betty McCollum and former Ambassador for Human Rights Robert Seiple -- to speak to large groups of Lao officials.

Relevance to MPP: In the Lao environment, every element of our MPP goes through the filter of MFA at some point if not continuously especially as we deal with issues of security, human rights, and religious freedom; encouraging DG Southam to greater openness, transparency, and cooperation -- all elements we believe the SEAS experience would encourage -- should help us make progress on the entire range of MPP goals. Since DG Southam is the senior official for the Lao side of our Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue, we believe that MPP goals will be easier to achieve through his participation in the SEAS program which will allow him exposure to officials from other countries and a broader understanding of U.S. strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific region.

Embassy POC: Political/Economic Section Chief Harvey Alan
- Somers; e-mail: somersha@state.gov; office phone: (856-21)
- 267231; mobile: (856-20) 552-6933; office fax: (856-21)
- 267030.

13. (U) Our alternate (following reftel information format):

Full name: Khamvone PHANOUVONG

Position Title: Deputy Director General, Asia-Pacific and
- Africa Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (since
- January 2006)

Responsibilities: DDG Khamvone oversees relations between the
- Government of Laos (GOL) and countries in both the Asia-
- Pacific and Africa regions - although MFA also has an ASEAN
- Department which deals directly with ASEAN issues

Previous Positions: 2002-2006 Counselor, Lao Embassy, Beijing
- 2000-2002 Acting DG of the MFA Press
- Department

- 1996-2000 Deputy DG of the MFA Press
- Department
- 1994-1996 Director of the Press Analysis
- Division, MFA Press Department
- 1991-1994 Third Secretary, Lao Embassy, Bonn
- 1986-1991 MFA Department One staff member
- 1979-1981 MFA Department Two staff member
- 1977-1979 Admin staff member, Lao Embassy,
- New Delhi
- 1975-1977 MFA staff member

Education: MA in International Relations, Institute for
 - International Relations, Potsdam-Babelsberg, Germany
 - Certificate in English, Victoria University of
 - Wellington, New Zealand

Publications: (none known)

Memberships: (none known)

Previous U.S. trips: (none known)

Languages/English: Lao, English; English is good

Post Objectives: Deputy Director General Khamvone occupies a key position at MFA since his Department oversees relations with China and Japan among others. Records show that Japan is the largest donor of official overseas development assistance (ODA) - somewhere in the range of \$85 million. Japan also has the potential to push for greater progress toward Government of Laos (GOL) transparency and better governance (although we would like it to do more).

- However, China is the more important relationship at this time. For years Vietnam has been the "model" for the GOL because of the close relationship of the leaders of both countries during the Indochina War years. Vietnam has played a key role in terms of GOL policies, including in the security area, and in training senior GOL officials - who spend up to six months in Vietnam before being promoted to the Director General level. However, now China is quickly developing its influence with the GOL and may be a larger donor than Japan. The Chinese business community is expanding throughout urban Laos, and Chinese companies, especially those involved with resource extraction industries, are becoming an increasing presence - and an increasing threat to the environment of Laos.

- Exposing DDG Khamvone to the SEAS process, having him meet other officials from the region to see how they view their relationships with China, and having him become more aware to USG concerns about Asian-Pacific security issues would increase the Embassy's ability to enhance its dialogue with the MFA's Asia-Pacific specialists about China and its future influence in Laos.

Relevance to MPP: China is one of the most important factors in the regional security portion of our MPP, and an enhanced relationship with MFA Asia-Pacific specialists will allow increased Embassy understanding of the GOL's views of China and better Embassy reporting.

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